

No Way to "Beat Race Game" on a Permanent Basis



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Many Owners, Bettors and Promoters Make Quick Money on Occasion, but Seldom Does Fortune Last Very Long.

BY J. B. SHERIDAN.

THE Kentucky Derby of 1918 was a remarkable horse race. It set forth as few great stakos races ever set forth, the utter absurdity of trying to "beat the horses" by betting on them. Exterminator, 3-year-old son of McGee, owned by Willis Sharpe Kilmer of Binghamton, N. Y., was the extreme outsider in the betting, the last horse that part of the public that plays races thought would win. If the public knew anything about horse racing Exterminator would have been absolutely and wholly last. To the contrary, he was first, first so easily that it was not a contest.

What an utter absurdity. War Cloud imported from England, Escoba, and six other horses, were considered much more likely to win than Exterminator. Escoba, only, had a chance to win. He ran second. War Cloud, the 7 to 5 favorite, the rich-man horse, the horse that should win, was fifth. Sewall Coombs, the third choice, was sixth. Exterminator, against whose chances you could have bet 100 to 1, who paid \$20.50 in the mutuels, won in a gallop.

How can you beat the race? Here is a great stakos race, one of the classics of the year, a race that many men want to win for the honor, glory and money that may be gained by winning it. A. K. Macomber, a young California millionaire, spent barrels of money to get a horse to win the Derby. Two or three valiant young Kentuckians went in debt to get the winner. The purse was worth \$12,000 to the winner.

Not All Value in the Purse.
If you wanted to sell your winner, winning the race was worth an enormous sum. So the poor men, the fellows who raise and train horses to sell, want to win the Kentucky Derby above all races in the world. Everyone was "trying." When a horse is beaten in a cheap \$500 selling race, people often say: "He was not asked to try." There could be no such explanation to the Kentucky Derby. Every horse in the race was "leveling." In there to try his best. The best procurable jockeys were mounted. A great crowd was out in the rain. Then Exterminator, forgotten in the betting and in public favor walked in with first.

What's the use of trying to beat the races? None at all. Nobody but Pittsburgh Phil ever beat the races. He is dead. Had he worked as hard at any other business he probably would have made much more money than he made betting on horses. He spent some twenty-five years in the game and died worth \$600,000.

After Exterminator had won the Derby many men said that they knew he would win, that his owner and trainer knew he would win. Yet only two bets were made on Exterminator in the \$25 mutuels, while over 800 \$25 bets were made on War Cloud, Escoba and Sewall Coombs. So on down the line. Hundreds bet \$10, \$5 and \$2 on other horses, where one bet on Exterminator. Which shows that many men claim wisdom which they do not own.

About 400 people thought enough of Exterminator's chances to bet from \$2 to \$25 on him. Only a few bettors thought enough of him to bet \$10 or \$25 on him. Some 300 odd bets of the 400 made on Exterminator were \$2 bets.

The pickers who find winning \$3 to \$4 very little worth while took a chance on the long shot and won. That is all. Doubtless neither Mr. Kilmer, the owner of Exterminator, or his trainer, Henry McDaniels, had any idea that he would win. If they had, they did not bet on him. McDaniels always has been a betting man.

Not very long before the race J. C. Milam, one of the smartest horsemen in the world, sold Exterminator to Mr. Kilmer for \$15,000. Had Mr. Milam any idea that Exterminator would win the Kentucky Derby he would not have taken less than \$40,000 for him. Exterminator added \$25,000 to his value when he crossed the winning line first in the great Kentucky Derby.

Sun Briar Not a Mud Horse.

race was run, so Sun Briar, who is not a good mud runner, was scratched out of the event. Exterminator, the trial horse, ran for the stable. As usual, the little-fancied horse won where the pet probably would have been beaten.

The trainer may have many useful horses, good winners, reliable animals, the horses that bring in the money when it is needed in his stable, but he will always give most time and attention to the useless morning glory. I have known hundreds of trainers who have had many good horses, but they would always talk of what their morning glory would do some day. "If I ever get that bird fit," they say, "I'll get rich overnight."

But they never do. The "morning glory" is never right, because he has no character. He is like a confirmed drunkard, always making promises which he does not intend to keep and cannot keep. He may have speed, staying power, everything that goes to make a racehorse, but character, courage, which, after all, is the mark of man

and horse in this world and probably in the next world, too.

Yet the trainer will devote more time to a "morning glory" than to a good horse. Of course, it may be that the "morning glory" needs more attention and gets more attention than a more, level-headed animal. Maybe the trainer feels that the failure of the "morning glory" is a direct challenge to his technical skill. In any event the "morning glory" is the pet of the stable, and the steady, level-headed horse, that wins regularly when he should win, needs and demands little humoring.

However, Willis Sharpe Kilmer does not need to worry much about "morning glories" or afternoon winners. He is in racing for fun, the only way in which any man has any business owning race horses.

A Dangerous Game.

Trainers, jockeys, etc., may profitably follow racing as a business, provided they get rich men to pay them large salaries and fees. Even then horse racing is a dangerous game—wasteful, attractive, and even for the man who follows training or riding as a business, it is in the end unprofitable. It is not a business. It is a sport. It cannot be made a business.

Whenever you try to make a sport a business you ruin it. Sport can no more endure business methods than business could endure sporting methods. The two are absolutely antithetical. I have given thirty years to sport, and my advice to the young man who wishes to "get along" is to avoid sport as he would a plague. Especially avoid horse racing.

Save "Pittsburgh Phil." I have never known any man who made money racing horses or betting on them. On the contrary, I have known thousands of men to go broke on the turf. Practically all of the great owners and bettors, trainers and riders, have died poor men. Some of them made a lot of money in horse racing, but it is an expensive business, and they died poor. Mike Dwyer, greatest of owners and bettors; Ed Corrigan, ditto; and a race-track owner, worth millions at one time, and scores of others lost their fortunes on the turf, and lost them quickly.

So, if you would follow the turf as an owner or bettor, make sure that you can afford to spend lots of money each year. Only very rich men have any business owning horses. They should

figure to spend so much on their hobby and let it go at that.

Willis Sharpe Kilmer, A. K. Macomber, the Whitneys, Duryeas, Belmonts, Keenes, etc., can afford to own horses and to wager on them, for they are many times millionaires. No doubt these gentlemen figure that they will lose \$200,000 on the turf. They are willing to spend that much on their hobby. Every now and then comes a year wherein the stable may show a profit, but on the whole it may be said that in four or five years even the best stables lose money.

A Costly Pastime.

Some men do make a living on the turf, a sort of living. They own a horse or two, a small stable. Keeping a stable is expensive. You must invest some \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year in horses. Each horse will cost you at least \$10 a day to keep. Hay, oats, labor, transportation, all are high. If you have stake horses that are heavily engaged to run in stakes, they cost you a great deal more. You must pay certain sums in installments when you enter a horse in the valuable stakes. Yet not one of fifty original entries in a big stake like the Kentucky Derby ever go to the post. The colts are nominated before they are born. You pay so much down, so much from time to time. Many of the colts die, some turn out to be no good, others get hurt. When race day comes probably 5 of 500 original nominations go to the post. The money paid in is never returnable. It all goes into the general fund and becomes part of the stake, which is usually divided four ways—so much to first, so much to second and third, the fourth horse to get back all his owner paid in in nomination fees.

Winning the average purse or selling race is worth about \$500. That means that a horse must win at least ten races to keep himself before his owner makes a cent. Few horses win that many races in a year. For every winner of ten or more races that an owner has in his stables he will have three non-winners or winners of less than ten races.

How, then, is the owner to make anything? He may bet, but that is a risky occupation. Of some 500 owners and trainers, stable boys and jockeys and hangers-on at Louisville when the Derby of 1918 was run, only two knew enough to bet \$25 on Exterminator. That shows what owners, trainers, jockeys and track hangers-on know about who is going to win a race.

When a man can't make a living owning horses or betting on them, what is he to do?

He becomes a "promoter." That is to say, he induces business men to bet on his or some other men's horses, the understanding being that he shall be given a certain percentage of money won, and, in case of loss, he held blameless.

This scheme works well when the horses the owner, trainer or jockey picks for his clients win. When they win, he gets his percentage—sometimes as much as half—of the winnings. If they lose, he is out nothing but prestige. On the race track they call this "touting."

Many hangers-on are also touts. They have a clientele or they pick up acquaintances among the casual visitors to the race track. They tell a plausible story—how they are "Jockey So-and-So's" brother, or maybe the trainer or rubber of a certain horse, or "slept in the stall with him" or in the next stall, or have a close acquaintance with the owner or trainer or with the jockey who is riding a certain horse.

There is another class of touts, a better class, men who are reasonably good judges of horses and gallopes, sober fellows, who get up early and who watch the horses work and time them in their gallops. They know the horses and their condition. They have a pretty good line on them. They attend to their business and reasonably good information may be acquired from them.

These better-class touts have regular clients, to whom they send or give, sometimes for a stated fee, at other times for a share of the winnings, if any. Many of these clients are in distant places and may bet with local bookmakers on the quiet.

A \$30,000 Tip Fee.

But the small owner is the most general and persistent of the disseminators of racing information. Many small owners do not bet their own money at all. Some of them really never have any money to bet. Others refuse to risk their own money in wagers and rely upon the profits made from "touting" to keep them in funds. Many of these small owners have regular clients, good bettors, men who will wager a large sum when told to do so on the result of a horse race.

I have known owners and trainers to make as much as \$30,000 on a single race in gifts from bettors whom they had "put down," as they say on the track. The late John W. Gates gave one man \$30,000 for information given

in a race at Washington Park, Chicago, in 1903. The man was by no means a small owner, either. He was a gentleman and owned one of the largest and best racing stables in the West, but he was averse to betting his own money, especially when he could get a millionaire to bet for him.

There are many owners of this sort all through the country, "one, or two, horse men" and many bigger owners, who "send winners" to clients all over the United States and Canada and expect in return a handsome fee for their trouble.

There are tipsters, too, who advertise special information in the racing and sporting papers. These fellows know no more than the next man. They, like all other touts, try to get a certain number of horses played in a race, thus insuring themselves certain returns. Some of them exact a set fee, others work on a percentage of winnings. They claim to have an intimate acquaintance with owners and trainers, claims which are mostly mythical. A smart owner will not tell any one anything about his own horses, especially not a tipster. Most of them regard the tipping privileges as their own very personal and private property.

Getting It First Hand.

Many trainers employed by owners of large stables, owners to whom the betting privileges are far from being an object, made large profits from the dissemination of tips. I knew one big owner, in this case a bookmaker, to whom the betting privileges on his own horses were matters of considerable moment, to say that he only got third or fourth hand information from his trainers, that the cream of the betting on his horses went to the best bettors who were clients of his trainers.

Managers and valets of jockeys, and jockeys themselves, are inveterate tipsters. No habitus of the turf is less agreeable to owners, trainers and officials than the manager of a jockey. Usually he is a "smart" fellow who picks up some boy who later develops into a good jockey. He makes engagements for his rider and thus has access to very good information, if any good. But if he knows that the horse his jockey is riding is fit to win and can win, the manager has good information. When the rider sets his final instructions he can tell whether the horse is "meant to win" or not. A signal informs the manager and he can then get his clients "down" with excellent chances of success.

The only thing that menaces the operation is that no living man can tell what every other horse in the race is capable of doing that day and the ordinary misadventures of racing luck such as a bad start, crowding, being cut off, interfered with, etc.

There is another class of "touts" known as "handicappers." These men do not pay much attention to owners, trainers or jockeys' information. They "figure winners" on past performances entirely. It is their business to assume that every race is run on the level. They make allowances for good or bad jockeys, condition of track, etc., but none for what is known as "cheating." The very foundation of their system is honesty of racing. On the whole they are the best and most reliable tipsters, for, while racing is far from being all honest, it is true that something like 51 per cent of favorites win during a season. Odds are laid against most of these favorites, so if a man bet on every favorite in every race during an entire season he would profit on the year. Which shows that racing is honest enough to be relied upon.

One great body of touts works on the basis that racing is always crooked. In many respects they make more money than any other touts. Their plan of campaign is this: Get some man with plenty of money who is willing to bet heavily on a "sure thing." Persuade him that a certain race is "fixed" for a certain horse to win, that it is crooked, that he cannot lose his money.

Many business men are caught by this scheme. To be caught they must be illy informed of racing affairs. It is extremely difficult to "fix" a race. It may be fixed and then "run out" on you, that is the best horse or one of the horses that had agreed to run "dead" "woke up" and won.

An owner or trainer may agree to run "dead," but a jockey who is in on another scheme, made to break up the "fixed" race, for the profit of another gang, may "ride out" the race. Some overlooked horse, some horse you neglected to "deaden" because you did not figure he had a chance may wake up, come on and win. I have seen this happen many a time.

In the old days of bookmaking there was camarilla within camarilla on the race tracks. Owners formed one gang, trainers a second gang, jockeys a third gang. The jockeys double-crossed the owners by running races to suit their own schemes. Owners double-crossed jockeys by putting them on unfit horses that they could not win with.

The greatest camarilla ever organized was that known as "the Little Pete" gang at San Francisco in the early 1900s. "Little Pete" was a Chinaman, a charming little chap, a Tong leader and a huge gambler. He got the best jockeys riding around San Francisco to ride races as he directed. He took hundreds of thousands of dollars out of the betting ring before the scandal was unearthed. Pete was afterwards killed in a Tong war in Chinatown.

It is, however, almost impossible to win money by betting on horse races over a protracted period of time.